



# THE PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING CONTEXTUALIZED GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH

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**Abstract:** This article deals with the principles of teaching contextualized grammar in English. Contextualized Grammar Instruction are given information.

**Key words:** communicative grammar, contextualization, language acquisition, process methods.

In foreign language acquisition accurate understanding of the language structures is the key part, so teaching grammar is an essential aspect of foreign language instruction. There has always been a debate about the most effective way of teaching grammar. Grammar instruction through context positively affects learners' competence to use grammatical structures accurately in language skills. It is always useful for learners to see how language works in sentences or paragraphs; therefore, teaching grammar in context will give learners opportunities to see how grammatical structures function in sentences. Teaching grammar in context will help learners to acquire nature of the language which will facilitate their understanding of the language.

Grammar should be addressed within meaningful communicative contexts as one element of language proficiency. Instead of focusing on grammar rules and diagramming sentences, teachers should guide students towards an understanding of how grammar functions. Students learn how to use the form rather than memorized conjugations that may not be applicable across contexts.

We have learned that grammar should not be taught in isolation from content. But then, neither should content be taught without regard to the language involved. A carefully planned integration of language and content however, holds considerable promise. Weaver stresses that teaching grammar in isolation will not be useful for learners and concluded that —teaching traditional grammar in isolation is not a very practical act. Thornbury adds —if learners are going to be able to make sense of grammar, they will need to be exposed to it in its contexts of use, and, at the very least this means in texts. —Teaching grammar in context provides a meaningful framework that connects to reality in the targeted language. Nunan stressing the advantage of teaching grammar in context writes: —An approach through which learners can learn how to form structures correctly, and also how to use them to communicate meaning. If learners are not given opportunities to explore grammar in context, it will be difficult for them to see how and why alternative forms exist to express different communicative meanings. —Many researchers stress the fact that learners need to experience grammatical conventions in various contexts in order to control and use them correctly. Context-based teaching will help learners how grammar structures function in context that will give them an opportunity to develop their comprehension of the grammar rules. Byrd states that when grammar is studied as arising from context, then a variety of forms emerge as essential to the expression of

particular meanings in particular discourse contexts . —It’s not just that different types of verbs are related to each other but that in particular kinds of discourse the idea of, relationship must be expanded to include the bond among verbs, nouns, adverbs, textual order, and even particular vocabulary.

After a great deal of debate in the last century over whether to teach grammar at all, most researchers now agree that grammar instruction can improve student writing if the grammar is taught “in context”. Instead of teaching grammar only with worksheets filled with drill and practice exercises, contextualized grammar instruction uses authentic and longer texts to teach grammatical rules and sentence structure. The rationale for teaching grammar in context is that because students have difficulty transferring what they learn in drills to their writing, grammar should be taught through the writing itself. Various methods of contextualizing grammatical concepts can be used to improve the writing skills of college transition students.

There are many approaches to teaching grammar in context. Some approaches involve teaching the skills and then showing how they can be applied in the context of writing, while others use essays written by the teacher or students to help students discover and learn grammatical concepts. It is useful to categorize the various approaches according to the level of contextualization that is involved:

How contextualized?	Using what?	Examples
Somewhat	Rules and diagrams	Memory aids, questioning, frames, charts
Mostly	Sentences	Sentence combining, transformational exercises, sentence modeling, sentence expansion, sentence rewriting, discovery approach
Entirely	Compositions	Grammar-specific topics, essay editing models, self-correction strategies, process methods

**Figure 2.** Approaches to Contextualized Grammar Instruction

**1. Somewhat Contextualized Grammar Instruction: Learning Grammar through Rules and Diagrams**

**Memory Aids:** Teachers can use memory aids to help students remember grammatical concepts so that they can apply those concepts to their writing. Possessive pronouns, for example, can be taught as students chant a memory aid such as “Possessive Pronouns Positively Prohibit ‘Positives’”. Students memorize the rule and then are provided with examples from their textbooks to contextualize it.



**Questioning:** Students can be taught to transform sequences of words into yes-or-no questions or “tag questions” to determine if the sequence is a complete sentence. The sequence “Jim and Sue can dance the tango,” for example, can be transformed into the yes-or-no question “Can Jim and Sue dance the tango?” or the tag question “Jim and Sue can dance the tango, can’t they?” and therefore the sequence is a complete sentence. Because “they” refers to “Jim and Sue,” the student can also easily locate the subject of the sentence and learn about fragments, run-ons, subject-verb agreement, and shifts in person.

**Frames:** Students can also be taught to locate main verbs by writing sentences into frames such as “They somehow got \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_” where the first blank is filled with the subject in an appropriate pronoun form and the second blank is filled with the rest of the sentence. For example, “Jim and Sue can dance the tango” becomes “They somehow got them to dance the tango;” thus, dance is the main verb. Sentences can be taken from drafts of students’ essays so that students can use frames to correct errors in their own writing.

**Charts:** The instructor writes a sentence such as “Those two big babies are crying” on the board and then asks questions such as “What question does the word ‘those’ answer?”. Students work through a series of sentences in this manner until they eventually realize how adjectives relate to subjects. Students record the steps of this analysis in a chart so that they have a visual display of the process. Students can also write the words of sentences from their drafts into a chart with classifications like “Preceding the Subject,” “Subject,” “Between Subject and Verb,” “Verb,” and “Following Verb” to learn about grammar through the structure of writing.

## 2. Mostly Contextualized Grammar Instruction: Learning Grammar through Contextualized Sentence Practice

**Sentence Combining:** Students practice working with a variety of grammatical concepts such as subordination, infinitives, and prepositional phrases. Some activities involve combining sentences with the use of cues, such as apostrophe-s plus -ing. For example, consider the sentences I was worried about something and My brother had disappeared mysteriously. Students combine the sentences as indicated by the cue apostrophe-s plus -ing: “I was worried about my brother’s mysterious disappearance.” Other sentence-combining activities eliminate all cues, allowing students to devise their own combinations. The most effective sentence-combining exercises use sentences from student-written drafts or provide context in terms of writer, reader, and purpose.

**Transformational Exercises:** Students practice correct usage by choosing sentences from their compositions and rewriting them. They are asked to change present-tense verbs to past tense or to change first-person pronouns to third-person, and so on.

**Sentence Modeling:** Students write sentences based on the pattern of a sentence from a literary work being read in class. The teacher can begin by providing blanks to indicate the sentence structure, although eventually students can imitate the sentences without such clues. Students can also rewrite sentences from their own journal entries by making them structurally identical to the sentences of a published author.

**Sentence Expansion:** Students write their own subject and verb and then are instructed to add various syntactical structures like modifiers. Eventually, students are asked to add to the subject and then to add to the predicate in a variety of sentence patterns.

**Sentence Rewriting:** Teachers can mark a sentence in a student’s draft that is in need of revision, but not state what the error is or how to correct it. Students then rewrite the grammatically incorrect sentence on a separate sheet of paper along with an explanation of the



error(s) in the students' own words. If desired, students can also use a writing reference text or a list of common errors provided by the teacher to help them identify their errors. They can then write several sentences using the pattern correctly, keep a journal of their most common errors, and even give a lesson to the class on that grammatical concept.

**Discovery Approach:** Students can draw their own conclusions about sentence structure by analyzing groups of sentences, some of which are correct while the others contain a specific error. For a fragment lesson, for example, students can read a list of 8 related word sequences, of which seven are fragments and one is a complete sentence. The students can then be asked to identify the complete sentence. Each sequence of words is discussed in terms of how it is different from the previous sequence. When the students examine the complete sentence with a noun subject and a main verb, they can be asked to define a sentence in terms of its structural parts.

### 3. Entirely Contextualized Grammar Instruction: Learning Grammar through Whole Compositions

**Grammar-Specific Topics:** To practice verb tenses, students can be given topics that specifically address certain grammatical concepts, like writing an account of a past experience that might affect a future choice that they will make.

**Essay Editing Models:** Using student papers or a piece of the teacher's writing as the basis of an editing exercise can help students develop editing skills, making the composing and revising process more productive in improving writing ability.

**Self-Correction Strategies:** Teachers can develop individual editing checklists for each student, depending on their particular difficulties, and then allow students to correct grammar errors in their own essays. Students can also read their drafts aloud slowly, noting any corrections, and then edit their drafts accordingly. Or, students can read their essays into a tape recorder, noting corrections, and then play the tape back while they follow along and make corrections. Teachers can also have students read their drafts by starting at the end and reading backwards sentence by sentence, allowing them to focus more on form and the way the sentence is actually written, word for word. As students read their sentences aloud, slowly, or in a different order, their errors may become more apparent to them. Students can also circle specific words in their essays, such as past-tense verbs or dependent-clause markers, to develop their grammatical awareness.

**Process Methods:** Evaluation sheets can be used to facilitate the peer editing process after the teacher models how to complete the sheet with sample drafts. The class can be divided into groups to proofread other students' papers, with each group focusing on one or two types of errors, after which the papers are returned to the authors for correction. Mini-conferences can be held with individual students to address specific grammatical problems in student compositions. The teacher might focus on one or two major problems, ask the student how to resolve the error, and then ask the student to correct the rest of the paper. Mini-lessons or brief explanations in grammar can also be provided by the instructor during class.

Various approaches can be used in sequence for the entire class, or teachers can group students by their needs and use a different approach with each group. Students who have difficulties with basic sentence structure may benefit most from contextualized rules and sentence manipulation activities. Learners who have an understanding of basic grammar but need editing practice may find reading-aloud strategies useful. More advanced writers can use checklists to



peer-edit with partners. Teachers can regularly hold conferences with students to re-assess their needs and revise approaches when needed.

Teaching grammar in context is introduced by Ron Cowan as a method that can consist of many techniques, which “could be used for achieving certain goals”

A teacher should be aware of grammar knowledge and know how to share it with students. There are some principles for contextualized grammar in teaching:

### **Basic principle 1 Grammar and lexis can not be separated**

Grammar involves structures and patterns that are made up of words.

Words are the starting point

- Words
- Phrases
- Lexical constructions
- Lexical chunks
- Pre-fabricated units

These combine with grammatical function words to create meaning.

Recognising certain grammar structures as lexical items means that they can be introduced much earlier, without structural analysis or elaboration. Indeed, since the concept of notions and functions made its way into language teaching, particularly as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) gained prominence, some structures associated with grammar started to be taught lexically (or functionally).

### **Basic principle 2 Grammaticalizing is the 5<sup>th</sup> language skill**

The ability to put words together appropriately to form meanings is the 5<sup>th</sup> language skill:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Listening
4. Speaking
5. Grammaticalizing

Grammar refers to what we know about a language such as phonology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, language skills are about what we do with language. This includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Controversies often arise when the boundaries between these two areas become blurred, as in the case of treating “grammaticalizing” as a language skill. In this respect, the present article will attempt to explain the background of the issue surrounding “grammaticalizing,” followed by a tentative definition of the term and a description of the techniques for its implementation.

### **Basic principle 3 Grammar has three dimensions: form, meaning and use**

A distinction is often made between language use and language form. In other words, there has been a continuous debate over whether to teach students the language or teach them about the language.

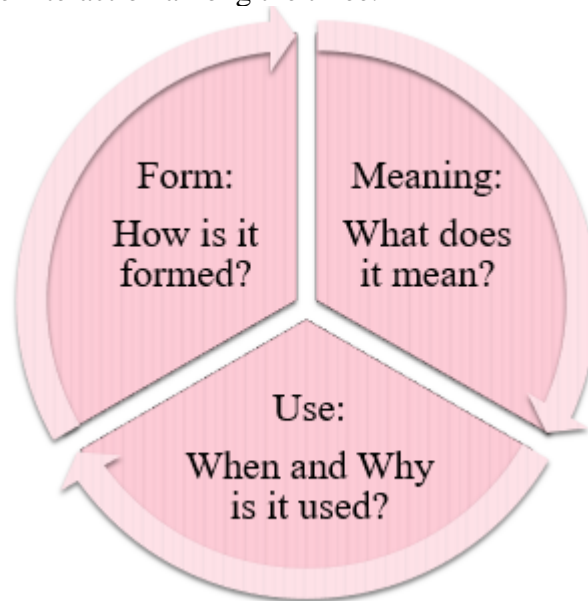
Teachers who focus students’ attention on linguistic form during communicative interactions are more effective than those who never focus on form or who only do so in de-contextualized grammar lessons

A 3D grammar framework: Questions every teacher should ask before teaching a grammar item.

Major departure from some traditional analyses of English grammar, and one we feel is in keeping with attempting to view grammar with a communicative end in mind, is the recognition

that grammar is not merely a collection of forms but rather involves the three dimensions of what linguists refer to as (morpho)syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Grammatical structures not only have a morphosyntactic form, they are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics). We refer to these as the dimensions of form, meaning, and use. Because the three are interrelated—that is, a change in one will involve a change in another—it is helpful to view the three dimensions as a pie chart, with arrows depicting the interaction among the three.



**Figure 3.** A 3D grammar framework

The question in each wedge of the pie provides further guidance in terms of defining what that wedge represents. In dealing with form, for instance, we are interested in how a particular grammar structure is constructed—its morphology and its syntax. When dealing with meaning, we want to know what a particular English grammar structure means, what semantic contribution it makes whenever it is used. Its essential meaning might be grammatical: for example, in our sample sentence, *She was walking home from school that day when she ran into a friend*, the past progressive signals a past action in progress. Or its meaning might be lexical (a dictionary definition); for example, the meaning of the phrasal verb *run into* used in our example means "to meet by chance."

Pragmatics, the domain of the use wedge of our pie, deals with issues concerning the choices that users of a particular language make when using the forms of language in communication. As such, it is a broad category. We use it in this book to mean the "relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language" (Levinson, 1983:9). We can account successfully for the pragmatics governing the use of a particular grammar structure if we can explain when it is used or why it has been used instead of another structure with the same meaning. For instance, we would look to the use wedge of the pie to help explain why the narrator used the phrase *ran into a friend* instead of *met a friend by chance*. To elaborate on another example above, a pragmatic explanation would again be invoked to account for the difference between *I looked up a word in the dictionary* and *I looked a word up in the dictionary*, different versions of the same basic structure. ESL/EFL students need to



know not simply how a structure is formed and what it means; they need to know why speakers of English choose to use one form rather than another when both forms have more or less the same grammatical or lexical meaning.

It is admittedly sometimes difficult to establish firm boundaries between the wedges in the pie, especially between the meaning and use wedges; as we have already pointed out, linguistic categories often have fuzzy boundaries. Nevertheless, we have found the three dimensions of the pie chart useful as a conceptual framework for teaching grammar. Since grammar does not deal simply with form, language teachers cannot be content with having students achieve a certain degree of formal accuracy. Language teachers must also help their students to use the structures meaningfully and appropriately as well. Thus, the three dimensions of form, meaning, and use make explicit the need for students to learn to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately.

#### **Basic Principle #4: Grammar teaching should be meaning-focused and text-based**

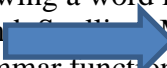
A focus on meaning and use causes learners to think about language

What grammatical choices should I make to fit the context and my purpose appropriately?

Thinking

Learning

#### **Basic Principle #5: Vocabulary knowledge is complex**

- Knowing a word includes:
- Sound  Meaning, Use,
- Grammar function, Connotations,
- Collocation, Related words, ...
- Knowing a word internalisation using a word
- Practice (USE) automatization / internalization

Teaching contextualized grammar helps students to see grammar in a new way, more realistically; helps to use grammar in real contexts and situations; train grammar in interesting ways; changes the students' view of grammar from "dead" rules to a lively, meaningful understanding of speech actions; clearly helps students to be more conscious and motivated about grammar; it helps teachers to stimulate the cognitive mechanisms of students, to organize their independent reflexive activity; texts will provide students with an excellent opportunity to expand their vocabulary with modern vocabulary; texts can be used for retelling as well as for real-world discussion topics; texts of various genres and characters contribute to broadening the students' horizons and knowledge of the world.

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